

Collecting Lepidoptera in Britain during 1977

By C. G. M. DE WORMS, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.E.S.*

The season opened with on the whole a very mild January, and only two days about the middle of the month with snow showers in the south of England. By the first week in February the early geometers were well out, in particular, *Erannis leucophaearia* D. & S. in good numbers. The larger part of this month was also very congenial, with no really cold snap and the temperature in the low 50's. March, however, opened with the first really warm days with the thermometer at 65°F. on the 2nd. This short spring-like spell brought out the early *Orthosias* in some quantity as well as *Achyla flavicornis* L., *Panolis flammea* D. & S., also *Xylocampa areola* Esp. In spite of this touch of spring, nothing was on the wing during a visit to the Ipswich district on March 5th. The mild conditions continued through the middle of the month and were still prevailing when I went to the Folkestone area on March 19th, but the following day, which was very sunny, but with a cold wind, produced nothing by day in the woods near Beckley not far from Rye, when I visited them in company with Mr. Michael Tweedie. The shallows were beginning to bloom over most of this area. March ended with a very cool spell, but it warmed up again in the opening days of April. Beating some blossom on the 3rd on the Surrey-Sussex border, failed to produce any larvae of *Chloroclystis chloërata* Mab.

On April 7th I set out for the north in very bleak conditions, meeting many snow showers along the M5 and M6. I reached New Longton, near Preston, in the late afternoon where my kind hosts were Dr. Charles and Mrs. Helen Goodall, now back in England after their five years in Jamaica. The next day, Good Friday, was really wintry when we visited Martinmere, the wildfowl reserve, which did not produce any lepidoptera, nor did Stoneyhurst College on Easter Sunday, the 10th. On the 11th, a very sunny day, I continued further north to stay with Dr. Neville Birkett and his wife at their home at New Hutton-on-the-Hill, just east of Kendal. There was quite an assortment of common species in his m.v. trap the next morning, with about 60 insects in all, including *Cerastis rubricosa* L., *Orthosia gothica* L. and *Biston strataria* Hufn., with a similar pattern the following night. April 12th saw us on Walney Island, just off Barrow, with plenty of bird life but no lepidoptera forthcoming either there or in the Lake District en route. The following morning I set out across country, via the outskirts of Manchester, to Stockport, then across the moors through Chapel-en-le-Frith to Dore, near Sheffield, to visit Mr. William Reid, the noted lepidopterist who has recently died. Conditions had warmed up considerably since the start of the Easter holiday, but no insects were to be seen in these attractive surroundings. I made my way south by the motorways on the 14th to find temperatures in the

* Three Oaks, Shore's Road, Horsell, Woking, Surrey.

upper 50's, but again the early butterflies had not yet got on the wing, nor was anything flying by day when I visited Dorset to stay with my relatives near Blandford on April 22nd. The Bridport area was equally blank on the 23rd when I called on Mr. N. G. Wykes, whose garden is usually quite productive. Though it was over 60°F. on April 25th in the New Forest, I could not find anything moving as yet. *Odontosia carmelita* Esp. had appeared in Surrey on the 17th, together with *Polyploca ridens* Fab.

After a mild end to April, May started with quite a congenial spell, but in spite of this, spring species were very tardy in getting under way both by day and night, possibly because of the very wet previous autumn. The first Pierids, mainly *P. rapae* L., were seen the first days of the month. They were not forthcoming in the Chiddingfold area on the 8th. However, a week later on the 15th, many hibernated *Gonepteryx rhamni* L., were about there and Mr. de Souza whom I met, had seen a single *Leptidia sinapis* L. Conditions continued very mild throughout the rest of May and everything had advanced greatly, including the vegetation, when I returned on the 29th after ten days in Provence. In fact, the thermometer almost touched 70°F. on June 1st. The next day, in Alice Holt Forest, many *Pieris napi* L. were flying, with plenty of *Pseudopanthera macularia* L. Once more in the Durfold woods on the 3rd, *L. sinapis* L. was now getting quite numerous and I was delighted to see *Hemaris fuciformis* L. hovering over bugle. Later it transpired that this day-flying hawkmoth was particularly plentiful in this area and elsewhere. It had been in very low numbers for many years and is obviously well on the up-grade again. General conditions continued fairly propitious during the first ten days of June. On the 8th, I accompanied Dr. J. Holmes to some woods on the edge of Woolmer Forest, where *Anthocharis cardamines* L. was quite numerous, with a sprinkling of *Clossian euphrosyne* L. still in good order. Other butterflies seen were *Pararge megera* L. and *Erynnis tages* L. The next ten days' temperature was well below average for the end of the spring period, with no really warm occasions, and only rising above 70°F. on the 23rd. It was altogether a very disappointing and lean period, which caused the season to become very much on the late side. However, it warmed up appreciably when I travelled to Kent on June 24th, making my headquarters at Ashford, but little was moving in the Folkestone area the following day. In the evening, Mr. George Youden joined me in the Orlestone woods, where members of the Croydon Natural History Society were also esconced with m.v. lights. Not much came to ours as the night turned cold. We had several *Alcis repandata* L., a few *Apatele megacephala* L. and also *Idaea subsericiata* Haworth. Searching posts and other terrain at Dungeness on June 26th, provided very little except *Hada nana* Hufn.

July opened with much more favourable conditions with, for the first time, the thermometer soaring to just over 80°F.

on the 2nd. The first *Plebeius argus* L. appeared then on the Surrey heaths, while *L. sinapis* L. was in plenty in the Durfold woods that afternoon with many *Ochlodes venata* Br. & Grey. It was again very warm when I went over to Dr. Holmes at Lindford, near Bordon, the following morning, and we had a long walk through Western Common, near Alton. Many *Pieris napi* L. and *Gonepteryx rhamni* were flying, but little else of note in this favoured locality, though later that day once more near Woolmer Forest, we saw a good many *Clossiana selene* L., *Pararge egeria* L. and *Maniola jurtina* L. On July 4th, at 84°F. in the shade, I paid a daytime visit to the New Forest, but it was surprising to see so little on the wing either there or at Alice Holt Forest en route. *P. rapae* and *P. napi* were in fair numbers, but the summer butterflies had not yet appeared.

On the afternoon of July 7th, in glorious sunshine and the thermometer at 78°F. in the shade, Mr. J. L. Messenger and I set out westwards on the M4 to Cirencester Park, where we halted on the edge of some woodlands. Here we found quite a lot of butterflies were flying, including *Argynnis aglaia* L., *Pararge egeria* L., *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. and *Ochlodes venata* Br. & Grey. We then went on to Oakridge, to stay with Ronald and Veronica Demuth in their delightful home set in a small secluded valley, which seemed to favour the lepidoptera that night. His m.v. trap the next morning had attracted nearly 300 visitors, including *Laothoë populi* L., *Sphinx ligustri* L., *Deilephila elpenor* L., *D. porcellus* L., as well as many *Hippocrita jacobaeae* L. and several *Apatele megacephala* D. & S.; also, some ochreous *Hadena lepida* Esp., *Apamea lithoxylea* D. & S., dark *Cerastis trigrammica* Hufn. and a female *Hepialus humuli* L. Nearly 500 individuals came the following night. Besides the species already mentioned, there were *Dasychira pudibunda* L., *Apamea sublustris* Esp., *Euplexia lucipara* Esp., *Pyrrhia umbra* Hufn. and many more *H. lepida*. But nothing was on the wing earlier that day in the woods round the Roman villa at Chedworth. I had been in touch with Dr. Neil Horton who invited us to join him at Usk on the morning of July 9th. We reached there in good time and in favourable conditions. He then piloted us by a somewhat tortuous route to a wild and mountainous spot not far from one of the mining towns in South Wales where we stopped by a large quarry at about 1 p.m. A small mountain stream with rushes growing in it descended quite close to the quarry. This little watercourse we started to climb, but the only insects flying in the intermittent sunshine were some fresh *Clossiana selene* L., several *Coenonympha pamphilus* L., while our host took a male *Parasemia plantaginis* L. We were about to prepare to leave at about 2.30 p.m., when Neil Horton spotted a small noctuid flitting over some rushes in the stream. Bobby Messenger managed to net it as it went past me and to our surprise it turned out to be a quite fresh male of the newly-discovered *Eriopygodes imbecilla* Hübn. Thereafter several more were seen careering over the heather and moor-

land, but we only managed to take one further example up to 4 p.m. when we had to leave. We heard later that in the week following this little noctuid was relatively abundant in this region, both by day and night. Eggs were obtained and the resulting larvae bred up to a later generation. It seems extraordinary that this little insect should have remained unknown in the British Isles until quite recently, since it must always have been in this locality, where it is apparently quite widespread, though as yet has not been found elsewhere. It seems to enjoy, as it does abroad, quite high levels up to 2,000 ft. and more. Later that afternoon, my companion and I proceeded some 150 miles westwards, via Brecon, Llandovery and Carmarthen to Haverfordwest, and on along the picturesque coast road to St. Davids, where we once more put up at the Whitesands Bay Hotel, which had been our haven in August 1975. As then, we inhabited the very comfortable chalet overlooking a small cliff by the sea, where we were able to run our m.v. trap to good advantage.

Fine weather and warm sunshine greeted us on the morning of July 10th, when we took a walk along the coastal path to see what was on the wing, and there was plenty to keep us busy. Some fresh *Argynnis agalaia* L. of both sexes were flitting about and settling on big thistles, with quite a number of *Aglaia urticae* L., *Maniola jurtina* and *P. icarus*. The afternoon was spent at Aber Eddy in the direction of Fishguard, which we had visited several times in 1975, but only *Aphantopus hyperantus* L. seemed to be on the move. During our ten-day stay in this attractive part of Wales, we once more made a thorough survey of many possible localities for lepidoptera. On the 11th we concentrated on a boggy piece of ground which we had been told harboured a colony of *Euphydryas aurinia* Rott. None of this butterfly was forthcoming, though the ground seemed alive with large Five-spot burnets, with plenty of cocoons on grass stems. We thought they were *Zygaena lonicerae* Scheven, but on showing them to Mr. G. Tremewan, he pronounced them to be the marsh form f. *decreta* of *Z. trifolii* Esp. There were many *O. venata* and *T. sylvestris* flying with the geometer *Ortholitha palumbaria* Fab. The next day, July 12th, saw us further south on the Pembroke Peninsula. Crossing the new bridge at Milford Haven, we travelled along the southern coast to Castle Martin, where we found some luxuriant sandhills. Though it was fairly overcast, a lot of mats of thyme seemed to attract some *A. aglaia* and plenty of *Z. filipendulae* L. The next couple of days were again sunny and warm when we surveyed the country nearer St. Davids, notably Solva and the cliffs towards St. David's Head, but nothing new was forthcoming. However, on July 15th, once more in sunshine we went to the Gwaum Valley, which lies well inland in the Fishguard direction. *A. hyperanthus* was in fair numbers in this very attractive region, but little more was to be seen later at Newport Bay. On the 16th, we visited a small valley leading down to the sea

beyond Solva, where we found another colony of the large *Z. trifolii* and our first *Pararge egeria* L. and *Heodes phlaeas* L. The last three days starting our second week, the weather began to break up badly. On the 18th quite a lot was still flying on Tretio Common, with the first *Maniola tithonus* L. and *Eumenis semele* L. being seen. This latter species also appeared on the rough ground near our hotel on our last day, July 19th, when *A. aglaia* was once more especially numerous.

(To be continued)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

With reference to recent criticism of my Collecting Notes, I feel I must clarify a number of points and would be grateful if you would allow me room to reply.

It would be a waste of time and space to comment further on Mr. Turner's absurdities and offensive attack on me, especially after Mr. J. Platt's neat and accurate summing up of the matter. Although the expressed sympathies of Messrs. Turner and Bell lie with the offender and they claim the damage he did was justified, the fact that this man has since been convicted of this damage in a Court of Law, proves that they were misguided.

Mr. R. Skipworth and Mr. R. Bell suggested that I had entered Durlston without permission. As Mr. Roger Smith has stated, I always try to obtain permission to enter locations where necessary. In the Durlston incident, my position had already been clarified on a previous visit, when I had a long conversation with an official warden (confirmed by his armband). He told me it was necessary to have permission to collect in the Light House area, but then indicated to me an area where collectors could freely operate without permission. That is, on the rough cliffs near the Hotel, and upon this advice I ran my traps there that night and on subsequent visits, and not in the Light House area.

Mr. Bell suggested that my traps were placed near an occupied caravan. On many occasions I (and doubtless scores of others) have set-up lights in the vicinity of this static caravan. On every one of my visits this caravan was obviously unoccupied, and on the night in question, I noticed no one in or near it up until the time I left at 1 a.m.

Many entomologists have written to me, and I am grateful to them for their best wishes and support in this matter. — DAVID C. G. BROWN, Jackson's Farmhouse, 25 Charlecote, nr. Warwick.

[This correspondence must now cease. — Editor]
